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**OBSERVER
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PUBLICATIONS****OTHER LINKS****Marriage
Proposals****Classifieds**

Music

Distinctive and refreshing vocal stylings

by Mahes Perera

Most singers who hit the highspots confess that when they are very very young they sing to themselves, and it's like a friend. It's something they have inside them and can't imagine living without it. And to beautiful Jennifer Palor who was in Sri Lanka to perform with Dylan Lye and his band from Hong Kong at the Mount Jazz Festival I guess the feeling would have been the same. Watching her perform on stage it was amazing!



The stage was her home, she was quite at ease and going by the blurbs that she has taken Asia by storm with her dynamic voice and intense performances, then it was ditto here in Sri Lanka. Her well controlled voice and enthusiasm was stunning. Hailing from Manila, lovely Jennifer was nurtured on a diet of pop in the Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey idiom. Her parents too were pop fanatics and Jennifer launched her musical career in Manila at the young age of seventeen.

She has had no formal training in fact as she proudly claims she is self trained. "My advice to young singers is be experimental when you sing a song at rehearsals. Don't close your mind because music is wide and elastic, especially jazz" voices Jennifer in soft clean tones. So

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when did the switch come from pop to jazz?

"I was offered a contract for six months at the Grand Hyatt, Hong Kong and that's how I started on Jazz and I'm glad it was in Hong Kong. I was backed by the Hotel band. I enjoy singing, I'm more of a contemporary jazz singer and I'm on a natural high when I start singing the opening bars! To some extent I must confess I am influenced by the singing of Stevie Wonder and Dianne Reeves. At present I sing at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Shanghai. Before the Ritz I've sung at many of the Hotels

in Hong Kong, China, Korea and at concerts.

They say you have a fan base with the youth in Hong Kong. Is it interesting? "There are many youth jazz fans. They make it a practice to check out the jam sessions and I'm making it acceptable to the younger generation. I coach the young to sing and I firmly believe that each person has something unique in them and I try and bring it out to benefit them".

Tell us about your album "Jenerations" which you released last year? "I wanted to capture all my feelings in song on this album and share it with music lovers. The CD contains nine tracks. I've included tracks like Ipanema, Fly Me To The Moon, Sugar - on this track Anthony Fernandes is on drums. On the track Boracay, Bubu Wijesinghe is on percussion.

The arrangements and production is by Dan Lovelle and Anthony is the Co-producer. I'm glad I came to Sri Lanka for this festival. This is my first time and the experience was great.

I hope I can come again to your beautiful country. We hope so too, to enjoy her refreshing and distinctive vocal stylings that reached out to both the youth and adults with success, with support from the extraordinary guitarist Dylan Lye and his accomplished band of musicians.

Maxi takes music to the maximum

Text and Pic by Nilma Dole

Meeting the musical Maxi Fernando is a sheer delight because this musician knows how to entertain an audience. Listening to him during his piano performance at the Cinnamon Lakeside, it's smiles all around and happy faces. Maxi shuffles between Taj Exotica to the Galadari even to the Taj Airport Garden hotel and Cinnamon Lakeside to give music lovers a keyboard treat.

"I was fascinated by music at a young age ever since I was the youngest member of Father Herath's orchestra at the All Saints' Church playing the French horn at the age of 12 years" he reminisced. Maxi is a self-taught keyboardist and says he first started playing when he learnt on a broken piano. "I accidentally found myself in a piano repair shop and played on a broken piano which is where I taught myself how to play it" he said. Maxi can play any genre of music including the famous Michael Jackson songs. "I like to play to please because if I find that the audience taps their toes to a certain music, I play along those lines" said Maxi.



Playing in a band called 'Still', Maxi found himself playing in Kabul, Afghanistan for nearly 2 years. "Back then we played contemporary rock and some commercial stuff and we had a loyal following" said Maxi. However, things took a different turn when the war started. "When the war broke out, we didn't even have money to travel back to Sri Lanka. It was when the friendly band 'Friends' came to our rescue talking to charity organisations and taking us from Pakistan to India and then finally Sri Lanka" said Maxi. However, still determined to travel the world with his music, Maxi headed to Baghdad where he played for 'Ice and Fire' with his best buddy Benjy (now famous with his band Aqarius).

"Thereafter, I went with Benjy to Switzerland where I played in 4 different bands" said Maxi. The four

bands were the 'Romeos', 'Serendib' with Indra Raj, a Swiss band called 'Baker's Group' and the most memorable band Maxi says he loved playing in was 'Leeyons'.

"What made the Leeyons fantastic was that there were black musicians who hailed from Sierra Leone and we played everything from reggae to African soul music which was a good way I got exposed to international music" says Maxi with a smile.

"The best memories of my musical career was when I was in Europe and playing for 6 years in Switzerland" said Maxi. In addition to this, Maxi also found himself playing in Norway with a band called 'Colombo Gems'. "I even had a stint in Jordan and Oman at the Inter-Continental hotels" he said. Maxi even met greats like Roger Moore and even Frank Sinatra during his European tour.

Coming back to Sri Lanka, Maxi played music at the Galadari with Noeline and a band called Skyline for three years. He even went to Maldives where he was a Guest Relations Officer, compere, DJ and event manager for a resort show. "It was after all the band life that I decided to settle down to a simple life of a soloist pianist which is a real crowd pleaser," said a happy Maxi. 'With special thanks to God Almighty,' Maxi acknowledges his wife Erin and children, Benjy, 'Friends' and every musician in the industry who has helped him along the way.

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